

**Remarks I Letter in Support of Senate Bill 2721, Counties and Townships
Committee I State of Illinois Capitol Building, Springfield I May 1, 2014**

As prepared for delivery:

Thank you Chairman Jackson.

I am speaking today in support of Senate Bill 2721, an amendment to the Local Government Debt Reform Act.

Grand Tower, located in Jackson County, and bordered by the Mississippi River, is in dire need of a major levee improvement project. A project that when implemented, will provide for the safety and well being of residents in Southern Illinois.

This bill is a vital part of the short term solution to remedy the financial issues that have surrounded this project. If enacted, local officials will have the ability to utilize tax payer funded dollars already appropriated for the improvement of the Grand Tower levee. Tax payer funded dollars from local citizens, for a local project, led by local officials willing to invest in the safety of their own property. Let's get this state hurdle out of the way, so they can get to work.

Before I began my term as a United States Congressman representing the 12th District of Illinois, I served as Adjutant General of the Illinois National Guard, commanding our state's military men and women. Too often, I sent those soldiers to fight flood waters from the Mississippi River. Too often, I've seen levees break, rivers flow over their banks, and sandbags give way. And all too often, I've seen the after effects of destroyed homes, lost belongings, and the anguish of starting over again.

I understand the challenges of fighting flood waters, and I understand the challenges of state and federal law. That's why, much like the legislators in this room, I've been fighting for Grand Tower. In March, I met with local officials while touring the damaged levee. I learned firsthand of the problems those officials face when simply trying to fix a damaged levee. By shining a light on this issue, I was able to push the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers to bring Grand Tower back into the System-Wide Improvement Framework. A necessary program to ensure the levee's future maintenance and improvement. I've engaged with the White House, and President Obama to give proper attention to this issue in Southern Illinois.

Last week, local, state, and federal officials came together at Shawnee Community College in Ullin to join a roundtable discussion I hosted regarding the spring flood forecast. Officials from FEMA, IEMA, the Army Corps of Engineers, the Illinois National Guard, the Governor's office, and the Delta Regional Authority were in attendance. These state and federal officials walked

through flood prevention tactics, flood mitigation strategy, and even flood response plans. The 40 local officials from county chairmen to city emergency managers were so engaged with these groups, that real progress was made in local flood matters. We received an update on the spring flood forecast, and I am here to urge immediate action on this bill so that we can begin work on the levee before it's too late.

It's imperative that we make the Grand Tower levee project a priority. We need to act in a proactive manner before the season's flood waters cause additional damage to the levee and cause millions of dollars in additional work. These repairs will ensure the safety of a small Southern Illinois town and its residents, but it also has a much larger effect upon the region. A class one rail line runs through area. A natural gas pipeline crosses the Mississippi River at Grand Tower and delivers supply to the Midwest. A regional power plant sits just north of the village, generating electric supply for this area of the country.

For 10 months, my office has been working tirelessly to move this project along. On that fateful day in June of 2013, I remember receiving photos of the drain pipe collapse while I was in session in Washington. My staff would send hourly updates, and news from levee commissioners, and the Army Corps of Engineers, as we were preparing for the worst. We brought together local, county, state, and federal officials to mediate the crisis and plan for the next step.

The infrastructure that is the foundation of the Grand Tower levee was built to last 50 years, and now that 60 years have gone by, we're simply playing a game of chicken with the might Mississippi. We will not win.

In 2008, Time magazine named Grand Tower the "Unluckiest Town in America." With devastating losses from floods, combined with the loss of federal flood insurance and hopelessly expensive mandates, it's no wonder Time magazine chose the small village. Today, we have the opportunity to turn this moniker around.

Mr. Chairman, I'm sure you'll agree that this isn't about federal government or state government regulations, this is about the safety of families, homes, and small businesses. This is about providing a secure environment for natural gas pipelines, power plants, and rail transportation that affect the entire Midwest region of the country.

I urge that Senate Bill 2721 be sent to the floor for a vote, so that government can stop hindering the levee project, and start fixing it.